

Mentoring: Tips for mentees



Reference Guide

Why seek a mentor?

A mentor is a more experienced person who can support your professional development through a series of time-limited, confidential, one-to-one conversations.

Whilst a mentor does not replace your manager, or have any authority over your day-to-day work, a mentor can assist your professional development by:

- Being a sounding board
- Imparting knowledge and skills
- Sharing lessons learnt through personal anecdotes and experiences including mistakes and successes
- Asking thought-provoking questions to promote self-reflection and self-insight
- Helping another person acknowledge his or her accomplishments
- Offering support, understanding and encouragement in response to another's frustrations and challenges
- Introducing your mentee to new networks and contacts

How long does mentoring last?

There are no rules about how long a mentoring relationship lasts. Not all mentoring relationships are the same, so the time commitment varies.

Depending on the goals you set with your mentor, the mentoring relationship may last 4 or 5 meetings or it may last up to 12 months or longer.

Choosing a potential mentor

When choosing a prospective mentor:

- Start by clarifying your purpose for wanting a mentor. To get the most out of a mentoring relationship, you need to know what you would like to achieve through the mentoring.
- Also clarify the characteristics and experience you are seeking in a mentor. For example you may want one or more of the following qualities – a mentor who:
 - Challenges
 - Encourages

- Is approachable
- Role models
- Is an effective communicator
- Has an interest in developing other people
- Is technically competent
- Has status, reputation and/or influence
- Is a good listener
- You trust him/her
- Has a good network of contacts

- Work out who you know (or who your manager/colleagues know) is experienced and has succeeded in these areas. Note: it is recommended that managers don't mentor their own staff as this creates a conflict of interest.

Once you have identified a potential mentor:

- Ask your manager/colleague for an introduction, if possible.
- Approach your potential mentor with a request to discuss whether they would consider mentoring you.
- If your potential mentor agrees in principle, meet and discuss how the mentoring would work for both of you.

Asking someone to be your mentor

When you approach a prospective mentor, be formal and courteous, respectful of their role and their time.

Ask for a short appointment (eg 30 minutes) to discuss your mentoring needs.

At the initial meeting:

- Thank them for agreeing to meet
- Talk briefly about what you are looking for from a mentoring relationship
- Ask them how they see it working from their perspective
- Ask them would they potentially be interested in mentoring

Mentoring: Tips for mentees



Reference Guide

- If the person you approach agrees to be your mentor, discuss and agree
 - Meetings: Discuss how often do you want to meet and how (face-to-face, email, telephone?) and where.
 - Timeframe: would you expect goals to be achieved in 6 months? 12 months? You may wish to suggest having an initial series of three meetings to see if the engagement is going to work for both of you, then renegotiate for up to a year if the outlook is positive.
 - Confidentiality
 - Agree how to exit the mentoring earlier if needed in a 'no-blame' way
 - When to review whether or not to continue the mentoring (usually after 3 meetings)
 - Date, time and place for the next meeting
- If the potential mentor is unsure, accept the outcome. Ask if they could suggest an alternate mentor.

Focus on the following when asking someone if they would consider being your mentor:



Tell the person you've enjoyed hearing them talk, or talking with them in the past.



Share your aspirations and goals ... and the type of support you are looking for from a



Frame your request as something for them to consider, not something they are obliged to agree to.



Don't take 'no' personally. The person may not have the time or bandwidth to take on the role of mentor.

It's not uncommon for people often hesitate to ask high performers to be mentors because they think they would be too busy or they have nothing to offer in return. However, research has shown that mentors gain from successful mentoring relationships as well. If they are not asked, they are not being given the opportunity to make their own decision. If they do say no, again, ask if they have other suggestions for someone you could approach.

Four Stages of Mentoring

Once your mentor has agreed to mentoring, there are typically four stages through which the mentoring relationship will progress:

STAGE 1: BUILD THE RELATIONSHIP

The first 1 or 2 meetings are about getting to know each other and discussing how the mentoring relationship will work. Discussion could include:

- Each person's background, experiences, interests and expectations of mentoring including frequency of contact, preference for communicating (in-person, phone, email) timeframes and confidentiality.
- Your career aspirations and key work-related challenges
- Experience from previous mentoring, if any
- Preliminary focus of the mentoring relationship

STAGE 2: SET GOALS

This stage is about exchanging information and setting specific goals. Goals can help you gain clarity, get the most out of the mentoring relationship and to focus your efforts. Through discussion, your mentor can help you clarify your mentoring goal(s). These could include improving skills in a specific area, finding ways of progressing your career or perhaps seeking guidance on a major decision.

Mentoring: Tips for mentees



Reference Guide

To gain the most from mentoring at this stage, it is important to:

- Share your goals and priorities
- Understand your strengths, weaknesses, successes and challenges
- Help your mentor understand your job and the context within which you work
- Discuss decisions you've made and actions you've taken so far in your career and the reasons why.

STAGE 3: WORK TOWARDS GOALS

This stage is typically the longest. The focus is helping you to work towards achieving your goals. Your mentor could do this through a combination of some or all of the following: guided conversations, sharing reference material, identifying professional development activities and introducing you to colleagues.

During this stage, take some time to reflect:

- How is the mentoring relationship progressing? What has been working well to date?
- What changes or adjustments are needed to the mentoring goals or the mentoring relationship?

During this stage, ways to gain the most value from mentoring can include:

- Active listening
- Taking responsibility for your own professional and personal development
- Maintaining confidentiality and respect
- Seeking and accepting both positive and negative feedback
- Seeing your mentor as a learning facilitator, someone who helps you discuss your goals and provides input, rather than advice.
- Being open to your mentor's efforts to help you see things differently, try different approaches and to think more broadly or deeply.
- Asking your mentor to share successful strategies and resources he or she has used in the past that could help with your goals or challenges.
- Reflecting on what has been shared and learned

- Expressing appreciation and letting your mentor know how you are benefitting from the mentoring relationship. This may include sharing concrete examples of how you've put things into practice.

Remembering you are the one leading the mentoring relationship, so it's up to you to schedule appointments and propose an agenda for each meeting.

STAGE 4: ENDING THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP AND PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

This stage includes bringing the mentoring relationship to a close, reviewing your initial goals and exploring the support which may assist you in the future. Your final discussion could include:

- Reflections on your accomplishments, challenges and progress towards goals
- Identifying what you will remember most about this mentoring relationship and what challenges lie ahead
- Exploring any further support you may still need, and from where or who
- Finally, express thanks and best wishes.

References

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